

The interview, conducted by Alex Bean on May 20, 2010, covers the breadth of *Jump Cut*'s run, though there is a strong focus on its first years in the 1970s. Chuck and Julia, a married couple, have served on the editorial board of *Jump Cut* since its founding. This experience, as well as their work as film studies educators in the greater Chicago area, make them an excellent source for the history of film in Chicago.

Q: Did a specific incident or discussion lead to forming of *Jump Cut* or did it just kind of happen on its own?

Chuck Kleinhans: Towards the end of our time in graduate school at Indiana University in Bloomington, several of us realized that although we were already publishing in different film publications—John Hess had been publishing in *Film Quarterly*, and Julia Lesage and I had published in *Cineaste*—no publication fit the kind of things we wanted to be writing, and work without modifying our own styles. *Film Quarterly* wasn't political enough, wasn't to the left, and *Cineaste* was concerned with being very readable rather than including scholarly perspectives. Which was fine—it's just that some of what we wanted to write was different. I think that was our first motivation.

I guess it would be in December or so of 73 when we actually decided that *Jump Cut* would come out in the summer of 74. I finished my degree in 73. Julia and I moved to Chicago. John and Judith Hess, his then-wife who was also involved in film, moved to California. Julia and Judith had regular full-time jobs. John and I were kind of trailing spouses with some time on our hands, so we did a lot of the initial work on *Jump Cut*. That was the origins of the journal. A friend of ours, Bill VanWert, also involved in film, was in Chicago in December for an MLA meeting or something like that, so he also came in at the ground level. Those are the main factors that coalesced. We saw the need for a publication and also we were concerned that a lot of the ideas we wanted to get out could be done by discussing contemporary films. So we wanted to deal with very contemporary films and also develop a radical analysis.

Q: What was the process like for submissions to the journal when you were starting out? Did you have to solicit submissions or did they just come on their own after word got out?

Chuck Kleinhans: Well, it was a mix; we obviously had some contacts, because we had met other people in film studies. We were at the core of a group of film lovers at Indiana University, so some of our fellow grad students were involved at the beginning — you know, folks who were contemporaries. We had gone to conferences, we had a range of other contacts, and Julia had a lot of contacts in the feminist film community. And then also our coming to Chicago — when we arrived in Chicago, there was a fairly active film intellectual culture, part of it around Northwestern University at that time with Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey. We had met Peter and Laura in England a couple of years before. Peter was then teaching at Northwestern but shortly thereafter left and went back to the UK. So we had a fairly active film culture of people interested in the same things. In all, these people we knew and had met in different situations, when we announced *Jump Cut* to them, we managed to get some to contribute to the magazine.

John found himself in a similar situation in the Bay Area. Initially he lived in Sonoma, a hundred miles north of San Francisco. But then he and Judith separated and divorced, and he moved down to the Bay Area, so he was part of a whole circle of film people and leftists there. You know, at that time Julia and I were also on the editorial board at *Woman and Film*, and through those contacts we met people like Constance Penley and Janet Bergstrom. Whenever there was a big film conference or even the MLA, we'd often run into people who were in town for that event, either in Chicago or wherever else traveled to. We knew Bill Nichols at that point—I think that's how we met him. There was a general atmosphere of community among young academic film people.

Q: How united was that community with the political aspect of *Jump Cut*? Was avid political discourse about contemporary cinema an avenue that people were really excited to get into?

Chuck: A lot of discussion around politics and culture was going on at that time. I mean that was the Vietnam War era, the women's movement was very active, the beginnings of the gay movement was very active and there was a lot being done around issues of race and class. We dealt with a lot of contentious issues. In many ways anybody that saw themselves as progressive had to deal with new things — like somebody might have come out of the traditional Old Left, but they had to suddenly deal with feminism. Somebody might have been part of the New Left or the anti-war student movement, but they had to deal with things like Angela Davis going on trial in California. Things happened all of a sudden and were inescapable. Like the disintegration of the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) that spun out into the Weathermen faction. Those people were into blowing up public toilets is how I would put it — you suddenly had to deal with people who were arguing for violent responses and had to think that through for yourself. Whatever position anyone took, there were lots of issues you had to process and think about, like what was the place of gays in the Movement, and so forth. People had many different affiliations—whether you were pro-China or pro-Russia or any number of other things. Different groups on the Left took different positions on

all of those things. It was something that characterized the New-Left in the late 60s and early 70s.

So I think in all those ways, people were wrapped into a kind of very active thinking that was always present around cultural issues. When we said *Jump Cut* would run articles on Cuba, or analyze Cuban films, that was a political act. To say, we're gonna talk about political films, we're gonna talk about Cuban films as political films, we also inherently have to take a position. Do we support the Cuban Revolution or are we critical of certain aspects of it — if so how do we do that? I think in all those different ways there were issues that everyone on the staff had to deal with.

We all came to *Jump Cut* with a different point of view. John Hess had lived in Germany and had traveled in eastern Germany, so he was familiar with that part of Europe. Julia had lived in South America for about three years, mainly Peru, and was very familiar with Latin American radical thought. Julia and I had both been in France and had participated in workshops run by *Cahiers du Cinema*. Also, I had done a lot of work in Continental literature and was a grad student studying French theory. We were all a part of something that we felt was still in process and ongoing, so our own work was wrapped up in that.

Q: With the shift from the newsprint you started on to the online publication you are now, has the process changed?

Chuck Kleinhans: I would say it's probably a lot smoother than it used be, in the sense that we can send stuff back and forth to each other a lot more rapidly. Initially, essentially, we were just using the mail, and also early on we ended up having both a collective of people working on *Jump Cut* in Berkeley and a collective in Chicago. The collaborative process was unwieldy, because a manuscript would come in that might be read by six people in Chicago and four people in California. Then you'd have a discussion back and forth where this person has this criticism and that person has that criticism, how do we reconcile this, how do we make a decision? We'd get feedback from certain people on the staff and we tried to have collective decision-making. It's very hard to do that, especially when you're separated by a large distance.

I think that over time that sort of process went away. We don't have an actual group of people meeting on Saturday afternoon anymore. We use specialist readers, but we can communicate with them by e-mail. Also, we know the people we're working with a lot better now. So, we sort of know how reliable someone evaluating a manuscript is — to read something and get their comments back right away. And we find it easier to get outside readers. For example, we just had a piece come in on Iranian cinema; well, none of us is an expert on that, but we know several people who are. So we got one of the people we know to read and give a judgment on that essay. We try to build a network of people who are experts or can give you feedback on certain topics.

Q? Were there any issues that *Jump Cut* got right or got in front of before others did?

Chuck Kleinhans: Definitely in terms of feminism and gay/queer issues. We weren't necessarily the very first, but a pattern emerged in the early 70s, where a film publication might put out one special issue about women, but then they would go back to publishing the same way as before. They would have a cluster of three or four articles on a special topic, and then the topic never affected them again. Whereas we were always committed — once we declared we were interested in an area, we would continue to follow through on it.

For example, we were always looking for something on gay issues, and then out of the blue we got this letter from Tom Waugh complaining about what he saw as the sexist caricature of gay men in an article that we had run. He was very offended by that essay, and I wrote back to him and said, "Good, we'd love to have you write for us. We take your point, we understand what you're saying. Please would you write for us?" — which he then did. I think he was a grad student at Columbia University at the time. Out of that publication, he knew Richard Dyer, we put together a special section on gay criticism. Some of the women on the staff then said, "Well, what about lesbians?" Rather than squeezing in some token piece on that subject, we realized we really needed to do a lesbian special section. Now it took a long time to get all that together, but we did eventually put together a special section on lesbians. So in each of these cases, we intended to do something, but it took some time to make the contacts or get the articles generated.

I think we always did a lot on Third World film as well, although *Cineaste* had a long record of doing that. Gary Crowdus, the editor of *Cineaste*, had worked for Tricontinental films, the main distributor for third world cinema at that point in history. So he had incredible contacts and interests, and gathering material on international cinema was something he was very good at.

I think those were some of the key things. *Cineaste*, as I said, wasn't very interested in academic questions. They wanted to pitch themselves to the educated film fan, but not beyond that. They were also hostile to anything avant-garde, semiotics and structuralism, things like that. Whereas we were sort of swimming in that aspect of film studies. We ran criticism of different aspects of semiotics, particularly some of the British work. But we took that work very seriously. At the same time, from very early on, we made it clear that we didn't want to have a jargon-heavy publication. We want readers, if they want to pursue those subjects, to be able to read and understand an article. It might be a little tough sledding for them, but we don't want something that's so opaque that only a small group of people who are completely conversant in Derrida or Foucault can understand what was going on.

We would take a certain amount of grief for this kind of editorial practice. Some people would say we were anti-intellectual, particularly when we rejected their article or sent it back for revision, saying, "Well, you need to change this or explain this." They would get very huffy about it: "You don't understand." We burned our relations with a whole bunch of people who thought that their work was wonderful and that we were vulgar.

Q: Where do you see *Jump Cut* going from here?

Chuck Kleinhans: I'd like for us to continue to expand our international coverage. It's very exciting, and we're in contact with lots of younger writers around the world who are very stimulating in terms of generating knowledge about the particular cultures that they are in. We've had articles about Indonesian cinema and Malaysian cinema—who ever knew anything about that? The people who are working on topics like that are really interesting, and some of these national cinemas that are developing, like in Korea, are areas where a lot of new energy is at work.

Also, given the current global situation, in terms of both politics and finance and the way that the world economy runs, a radical analysis is always pertinent. People in the rest of the world see that very easily. If you're in a developing country or even one that's fairly well developed in some place like India, people are looking around themselves and saying, "Oh my God, we're now becoming a consumer culture — rather than what we were before." They also face all these ways of corporations pitching advertising to children, trying to make them into little consumers. That's something that we're familiar with in the United States, and that we've developed radical critiques of. But it's something new in lots of other cultures. So if we can be a vehicle for helping people understand that capitalist process as it's affecting them, that's all to the good. That's a contribution that we as a left journal can make that could have a long-lasting effect.

INTERVIEW SWITCHES TO JULIA LESAGE

Q: Was there any specific incident or discussion that lead to the formation of *Jump Cut*?

Julia Lesage: I think that my husband, Chuck, first discussed it with John Hess, our other co-editor. When we moved to Chicago I had had a full-time job at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and Chuck was working part-time. The film journal was something that he and John originally thought about, and then we all became co-editors.

Q: What were your initial contributions to *Jump Cut*?

Julia Lesage: Well, we all read the all articles and commented on them. We quickly gathered a collective around us; there was a collective in Berkeley, one in Chicago, and for a very short time I think there was something going on in New York. People would meet at our house on Saturday and read articles and write comments on them, and we would synthesize those. The different number of people at the collectives would vary from time to time.

Q: In the early days of *Jump Cut*, what was the relation to other cinema publications?

Julia Lesage: Well, I think we were always very close to Gary Crowdus and *Cineaste*. He sent us in our first paid subscription; I certainly remember opening his envelope with a check in it — that was a wonderful thing. We felt close to the original *Women in Film*; they didn't publish too many issues, but we felt a kinship. And then when *Camera Obscura* was founded we felt close to them. There were also a number of other periodicals we sympathized with, though they didn't always run articles on film. *Radical America* was one of them, as was

Socialist Revolution that later became *Socialist Review*. They were the kinds of publications we subscribed to and read.

We also all had a copy of Andrew Sarris' *The American Cinema* on top of the TV set in our house, either to see these films theatrically or watch them as they came on TV. I think that we read film reviews and appreciated film reviewers. For example, the *Chicago Reader*, or all the *Readers* among the various cities, had really good film review writing. One of our members of our editorial board, Ruby Rich, who wrote a book that discusses her relationship to *Jump Cut* (among other things) was writing for the *Chicago Reader*. There were a lot of people who crossed over from one to the other. I think that because I had an academic job, I did academic writing, so we always had a foot in academic publishing.

Q: How widely disseminated outside of the Chicago and Berkeley hubs was *Jump Cut*?

Julia Lesage: Mail subscriptions and bookstore subscriptions went all over the world, but both paper and postage were very expensive. Peter Biskind used to help a lot with New York distribution. If we traveled to some event in a city, we could go around to bookstores and just personally take issues in and out. It was sort of a hand operation. I remember we for a long time sent all of the subscriptions out ourselves, so we would have all these newspapers in our house and box them up and sent them off to bookstores in different cities or to individuals. That was when the printing was done in Chicago. Later when the printing was done in California, it was possible just to have a subscription service pick the copies up from the printer. So that was easier.

Q: Was *Jump Cut* ever a money-making endeavor?

Julia Lesage: Oh, never, never, never. We had first worked in the underground press. The reason offset printing, on newsprint paper, was so cheap was that it was how a business like your neighborhood grocery store delivers a flyer to your house every week. That's the level of printing we used and that's why it's relatively inexpensive. That was the basis on which the free press of the sixties, the hippie press, the movement press, was founded. It flourished in the sixties into the eighties. We had worked in that underground press movement on our own campus, Indiana University, where all of us future *Jump Cut* editors were in the Comparative Literature department together. The radical campus newspaper was called *Common Sense*. I loved working in this marvelously lively press movement at the time. If you're thinking about looking back on those days, if you're looking at Chicago institutions, it was a wonderful media force — national, maybe international, and quite a phenomenon.

As I recall we each put in one to two thousand dollars cash for each printing of *Jump Cut*. At first we came out more frequently but later we settled into once a year. As the subscription base grew or the production prices rose — eventually we charged more per issue — in all those years John, Chuck, and I each put in about one to two thousand dollars per year directly into the printing, and then in kind for postage and phones and maintaining offices and things like that. We all put in our own money for things like that.

I always have advocated thrifty media-making, because I also became a video maker, a documentary maker. They now call those DIY projects, but I always would tell folks that you could continue to do this kind of thing your whole life if you didn't expect to live any better than you did when you were a student. You just put that extra money into your art or into projects—like tithing for your art.

Q: So *Jump Cut* was always something of a labor of love for everyone involved?

Julia Lesage: Yeah, a political commitment.

Q: That sense of political commitment comes through in the writing. Was the editorial staff unified in their politics?

Julia Lesage: Oh, no, you certainly know nothing about the sixties if you think any collective was unified. Oh, my God, no. People would argue passionately for points, there would be political and personal divorces, feuds, all kinds of things. I think, yes, that we were unified on the basis of New Left marxist, feminist politics, and we were one of the first publications to become actively pro-gay. Within that consensus, there were always lively disagreements, but that was part of the climate of that period.

Q: Did all of the submitted articles have the same leftist bent that *Jump Cut* espoused?

Julia Lesage: Well, we openly posited that we were a Left journal. So if you say you're a Left journal, you'll get Left-sympathetic submissions. I would say some articles were more formalist, some were more historical, some were more analyses of Hollywood films. We had a great interest in analyzing Hollywood films at the beginning, and thought that Hollywood had some lively new directors. So that was the kind of thing we would get articles on, and a lot of articles on documentary too.

Q: As a group, did you have a strong sense of what the political battle lines were and how they shifted?

Julia Lesage: Let me go back just a step, Chicago was really quite unique in that there was a real lack of sectarianism in the Left in general, but especially within the media community. The experimental film/video community, the documentary community, the people who worked for places like Britannica, which had good film editing facilities, other people like Barbara Scharetz, who worked at the Film Center and made experimental film — all these people were incredibly helpful to one another and had almost no serious differences to speak of. That was very unusual, I think, across the country, and probably still marks the community today. In other words, I think the people at the Film Center of the Art Institute and the people at Kartemquin just assume they're on the same wavelength.

Q: Were there any issues that *Jump Cut* got right or got in front of before others did?

Julia Lesage: Well, I think we were doing quite a lot of feminist criticism and I think we did gay and lesbian criticism much earlier than other publications. That reminds me, when

we started *Jump Cut* it was very clear that Film Studies was emerging as a discipline and that we could shape the discipline. And in fact we did shape the discipline. We won! That's good. I wish the social history had changed a little bit, but we certainly marked the discipline.

Q: Where do you think *Jump Cut* goes from this point in 2010?

Julia Lesage: Well, first of all, we are very forward-looking in publishing articles about the media and the Internet, well in advance of a lot of more traditional film studies people. In addition, I think that we have become an academic resource because we have so much free material available for classroom purposes.

ADDITIONAL CONTEXTUAL MATERIAL ADDED BY CHUCK KLEINHANS

In terms of any bibliography, the only thing that can truly be cited about this project is the invaluable online back catalog of *Jump Cut* issues. There are fifty issues of articles, interviews, and editorials for anyone's perusal at our web site: <http://www.ejumpcut.org/home.html>. Any and all research on *Jump Cut*, Chuck Kleinhans, or Julia Lesage must begin there.

Some additional points:

There were various connections that made the overall community diverse in various ways. For example, Paddy Whannel taught at Northwestern and had come to the US from the British Film Institute Film Department. He had co-authored one of the first books on popular culture with Stuart Hall. He was interested in education, and connected with high school teachers by running workshops on teaching film.

We were also connected by friendships with some of the other institutions that were getting started at that point in the 70s:

- ! The Film Center of SAIC just started.
- ! Of course, University of Chicago DOC films was a resource, and Gerald Mast was hired to start a film studies program at U of C.
- ! Chicago Filmmakers started at that point screening weekends in art galleries, and we knew those folks.
- ! The first Chicago International Women's Film festival was sponsored by the *Tribune* and brought together a lot of women across the city who continued to be involved: Laura Mulvey, Julia Lesage, Virginia Wexman, Ruby Rich, Patricia Erens, and women from the industry, etc.
- ! Similarly, Chicago had one of the first Gay and Lesbian film festivals and we knew most of the folks involved with that.
- ! Women in the Director's Chair was also an ongoing presence with yearly festivals.
- ! Facets Multimedia was also getting started, and with Milos Stehlik's background, it had a strong interest in European film, especially Central European work coming out of socialist societies.

All of these groups brought new and diverse programming to Chicago, with a strong presence of politically progressive work as well. And there was a history of local groups and filmmakers who were involved in social and political issues, such as Kartemquin. At the same time, most of these groups were pretty much white-people-organized and dominated. It was a little later that you got things like the Blacklight festival or the Chicago Latino festival which were important for expanding the horizons and bringing together new groups.

It's also worth remembering that in general filmmaking has a pretty high entry cost in terms of money, technological savvy, and training. The Community Film Workshop trained minorities and others to enter the media workforce rather than directly to make films. Minorities were more likely to turn to video as a far less expensive option for media making. The Center for New Television provided training, facilities, and equipment for people to make video ranging from cable access shows to free standing productions.

Chicago has an interesting relation to media: Los Angeles is dominated by Hollywood and New York by mainstream commercial media in print and broadcast. Chicago has had a longer history of connections with educational media, advertising, industrials, etc. and a diversity of smaller production houses, projects, etc. In that way it's more flexible and maybe interdependent.